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UNCLAS SANTO DOMINGO 002005

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/CAR, WHA/CCA, WHA/PPC, DRL; SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR
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SUBJECT: EMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO HELPS MOVE CUBAN DISSIDENT
TO POLITICAL ASYLUM IN SPAIN

1. With the help of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Embassy Santo Domingo facilitated the travel of Cuban dissident Mario Clavero through the Dominican Republic April 5-6 to Spain, which had agreed to grant him political asylum.

2. Clavero, a human rights advocate in Cuba, attempted to travel illegally to the United States nearly two years ago. He was picked up by the U.S. Coast Guard just 10 miles from the United States coastline. On his way to be repatriated, Clavero was able to demonstrate to a DHS official that he had a credible fear of persecution if he returned to Cuba. His seven fellow travelers (acquaintances, but not close friends) were taken back to Cuba, while Clavero was taken to Guantanamo Bay Naval Base for further processing.

3. Separated from his wife and children, who were able to leave Cuba or were already living abroad, Clavero had to wait in Guantanamo Bay for the process to sort itself out. According to an Internet source, at one point he participated in a hunger strike because of the delay in processing asylum claims. According to Clavero, he ended up waiting in Guantanamo Bay for "20 months and five days" while U.S. officials worked with the IOM to find a third country that would accept him. Clavero described conditions in Guantanamo as basic, saying that for some time he had to share a small room with two other asylum seekers. Although he was treated well and was able to move around much of the base, he felt overwhelmed by the monotony of life, an opinion shared by an IOM representative posted to Guantanamo Bay for a year-long assignment.

4. At last Clavero received word that Spain would accept him, and the Department and IOM officials began the process of getting him there. Spain wanted Clavero to arrive with a travel document and visa. Since he had no passport, the decision was made to send Clavero to the nearest Spanish Consular Section (in Santo Domingo) with an IOM-provided travel document in order to solicit a Spanish visa. Officials in Madrid were advised of the plan, and they in turn notified the Spanish Embassy to prepare to issue Clavero the visa.

5. A key step was to obtain permission from the Dominican authorities for Clavero to enter and depart the Dominican Republic without a passport. IOM official in Santo Domingo Fanny Polania appealed directly to Migration Director Carlos Amarante Baret, who signed a letter granting Clavero permission to enter the Dominican Republic to solicit a Spanish visa. With the documents in order, arrangements were made to fly Clavero to Santo Domingo on military air and then proceed to Spain on a non-stop flight, where he would officially apply for political asylum.

6. Clavero arrived in the Dominican Republic on April 5 on a U.S. Navy aircraft. This was Clavero's first flight and, except for the failed attempt to enter the United States, the first time that he had been outside of Cuba. Although there was some difficulty with migration officials, a call to the Deputy Migration Director cleared things up, and Clavero's entry was approved. After an overnight stay in a hotel, Clavero proceeded to the Spanish consular section for an appointment with the Consul General. The Spanish officials were well prepared for the appointment. After reviewing the documents and filling out a few forms, they issued the visa on a blank sheet of paper.

7. With visa and travel document in hand, Clavero was escorted by IOM to the Santo Domingo airport to fly to Madrid and on to Alicante, where he was at last reunited with his wife and daughter.

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